

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM USMISSION USBERLIN

TO AMEMBASSY BONN

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1949

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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E O 11652: NA

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, WB, AS

SUBJ: CLOSURE OF AUSTRALIAN MILITARY MISSION IN BERLIN

1. DEPUTY HEAD OF AUSTRALIAN MILITARY MISSION (HUME) INFORMED MISSION OFFICER FEB 4 THAT CANBERRA INTENDED TO CLOSE DOWN AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION IN WEST BERLIN. THIS DECISION, TAKEN SUBSEQUENT TO REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS ORDERED BY NEW FRASER GOVERNMENT, WAS DICTATED SOLELY BY ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS AND WAS NOT INTENDED TO HAVE ANY POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS VIS-A-VIS ALLIED PRESENCE IN BERLIN. HUME NOTED THAT HIS MISSION HANDLED ONLY MINIMAL CONSULAR LOAD (SOME 20 CASES PER YEAR) AND ITS EXISTENCE WAS THEREFORE HARDLY JUSTIFIABLE IN CANBERRA'S EYES WHEN IT CAME TO APPORTIONING EVER-SCARCER FINANCIAL RESOURCES. NO DATE HAD BEEN FIXED FOR CLOSURE OF MISSION, BUT THIS WOULD PROBABLY TAKE PLACE AS SOON AS NECESSARY ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE COMPLETED.

2. TO HUME'S KNOWLEDGE, AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO MAINTAIN MILITARY MISSION "ON PAPER",
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WITH AMBASSADOR IN BONN CONTINUING TO SERVE AS

HEAD OF MISSION AND SECOND EMBASSY OFFICIAL BEING APPOINTED AS DEPUTY HEAD. AMBASSADOR WOULD PROBABLY VISIT BERLIN MORE FREQUENTLY THAN HERETOFORE AS MEANS TO DEMONSTRATING CONTINUED AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT FOR POSITION OF WESTERN ALLIES HERE.

3. MISSION OFFICER EXPRESSED REGRET AT AUSTRALIAN DECISION, NOTING THAT ALLIES REGARDED MAINTENANCE OF SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN BERLIN ON PART OF FORMER WARTIME ALLIES AS VALUABLE SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITION. THIS WAS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT IN VIEW OF RECENT INCREASE IN SOVIET BLOC REPRESENTATION IN CITY.

4. COMMENT: AUSTRALIAN DECISION IS APPARENTLY FINAL AND THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE LITTLE THAT WE CAN DO OTHER THAN EXPRESS REGRET. WE ARE, OF COURSE, CONCERNED AT POSSIBLE WIDER REPERCUSSIONS. IN LIGHT ALSO OF DECISION OF DANES AND GREEKS NOT TO REPLACE RECENTLY-DEPARTED RESIDENT DEPUTY HEADS OF MISSION, OTHER WESTERN GOVERNMENTS WHICH MAINTAIN MILITARY MISSIONS HERE BUT WHOSE INTRINSIC BERLIN INTERESTS (CONSULAR AND/OR COMMERCIAL) ARE NO MORE THAN MARGINAL MAY NOW ALSO BE INDUCED TO REEXAMINE NEED FOR PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN CITY AND CONSEQUENTLY EITHER TO REDUCE SIZE OF STAFFS OR TO ELIMINATE MISSIONS ENTIRELY. ABANDONMENT OR AT LEAST LESSENING BY AUSTRALIANS, DANES, AND GREEKS OF WHAT IS IN LARGE PART SYMBOLIC PRESENCE CERTAINLY MAKES IT EASIER FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW SUIT. IN EFFORT TO COUNTER ANY SUCH SNOWBALL EFFECT, WE WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNE MOMENTS TO STRESS TO SENIOR RESIDENT MILITARY MISSIONS MEMBERS IMPORTANT ROLE THEY PLAY IN SUPPORTING ALLIED POSITION IN BERLIN AND TO URGE THEM NOT TO REDUCE THEIR REPRESENTATION HERE. GEORGE

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